

THE MUSLIM PARENT'S GUIDE TO THE EARLY YEARS (0-5 YEARS)

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⇒ SPEND TIME WITH & TALK TO YOUR CHILD

It is essential to spend quality time with your child, playing and talking with them. Not only is it fun for you both, it helps foster a good relationship between you and makes the child feel valued. It is all too easy to neglect a child's emotional and spiritual needs especially in a large family. It goes without saying that it is hard to spend time individually with each child if you have other children, and even if you don't. However, a golden rule is for each parent to set aside at least half an hour for each child to spend as the child wishes. It would be no exaggeration to say that just this small amount of your time will pay dividends for your child's future life. They are much less likely to misbehave if they feel that they are being given your complete and undivided attention.

If despite benefitting from your undivided attention and calm manner, your child still behaves badly, it is tempting to just shout at them. Don't give into temptation! Hold your child, ask them what is wrong and what they are feeling. If they are too young to articulate themselves then ask them specific questions to find out how they feel. Reassure them that you want to work with them to sort out the problem. Once your child realises that you are on their side, then they will insha'Allah calm down.

For example, a common problem is that you tell your child you cannot buy them a particular toy in the shop. They respond by crying and acting out. What do you do? The best thing is to remain calm yourself. Stop whatever you are doing, address them by their name, hold their hand, get down to their level and with a firm but calm voice explain to them why they cannot have that toy in clear and simple language. Explain, for example, that they have plenty of toys at home and that you will, insha'Allah, take them to the park

later to play on the swings. You must, however, never promise to give a reward to a child that you do not intend to give them as this counts as a lie and your child will lose their trust in you. When you have the time, you may consider telling your children, in an age-appropriate manner, about those less fortunate than themselves who do not even have enough food or clean water.

TIME OUT

Toddler tantrums are exhausting and embarrassing for parents. It takes quiet and determined effort to calm your child down without getting agitated yourself. There are stages in your child's life when they are more prone to tantrums (think "terrible twos"!) but even older children can respond to certain triggers by screaming, shouting and hitting out.

Again, the first thing to do is to remain calm yourself and start by talking to your child as above. If you find that this is not working even though you have made it clear what they have done wrong and why, then put them in the "time out spot". This is a clean and safe area of the house such as a corner or a step (but never a cupboard) that you always use for this purpose. While doing this, you must be gentle but firm and do not show your anger. If your child moves from their spot, then simply pick them up and put them back, all the while explaining why you are doing this. Ask them to think about what they have done wrong and use the quiet time to calm down. This may take a while, but it does work. However, you and your spouse (or other carers) must be consistent in implementing the time-out for it to be most effective.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ responded to lying by ignoring the liar as the following *hadith* indicates:

If the Messenger of Allah came to know that one of his household told a lie, he would try and ignore him until he repented. (Ahmad)

It is interesting to note that he did not become angry, so neither should you when confronted by less than Islamic behaviour. If the child is too young to understand your silence then explain it to them in the context of the *hadith*. Insha'Allah they will recognise the enormity of their actions, apologise and not repeat it.

REWARD CHARTS

Your patience can be tested if your child refuses to do the little tasks that you ask of them, such as tidy their room. Instead of punishing the bad behaviour, it can sometimes be easier to encourage the good behaviour instead.

Every time your child does something that you have asked, reward them with a star sticker or stamp (or anything that represents achievement) on a brightly-coloured reward chart placed prominently in the house. You may wish to reward them with a gift or treat if they can accumulate a certain number of rewards within a certain amount of time. Again remember to only promise them what you can actually fulfil as the following *hadith* narrated by Abdullah ibn Amir رضي الله عنه cautions:

“My mother called me one day when Allah’s Messenger ﷺ was in our house. She said, ‘Come and I will give you something.’ Allah’s Messenger ﷺ asked her, ‘What do you intend to give him?’ She said, ‘I want to give him

dates.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'If you were not to give him something, your statement would be recorded against you as a lie.'" (Abu Dawud)

If you set out targets that your child should achieve, then the reward chart technique will instil a sense of achieving goals. In addition, your child will realise that if they work steadily and patiently then they will be rewarded for it, which is a good habit to set up for life and a good basis to explain the life of this world and the reward in the next.

TEN DOs BEHAVIOUR ACTION PLAN

- 1 DO establish ground rules.
- 2 DO involve your child in these rules.
- 3 DO make rules positive and fair.
- 4 DO remind your child what Islam says about respecting parents.
- 5 DO praise your child.
- 6 DO give them activities to keep them stimulated.
- 7 DO introduce new activities.
- 8 DO encourage your child to do good and forbid evil.
- 9 DO reward your child.
- 10 DO give time to your child.

Of course there are many other things that should be done but these are some to focus on.